DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 093 165 FL 005 818

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TITLE Motivation for English in an Examination-Geared School System.
PUB DATE Jan 74
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (7th, January 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Arabic; College Language Programs; Curriculum Evaluation; Curriculum Planning; Educational Innovation; *English (Second Language); English Curriculum; *English for Special Purposes; English Programs; Higher Education; *Language Instruction; Language Proficiency; Secondary Schools; *Student Motivation; Teacher Shortage
IDENTIFIERS *Egypt

ABSTRACT

In the Egyptian school system, English is required of all students beginning in the seventh year of study. However, few master the language well enough to handle it at the university level, where it is the medium of instruction in all subject areas. At the secondary level, students are highly motivated in sciences and mathematics, since their examination scores in these subjects will largely determine their academic future, but they can see no immediate reason for a diligent study of English or of any other foreign language. An entirely different approach to the study and use of English should be taken. English should not be required but should be optional, resulting in a smaller program of higher quality with motivated students. Motivation could be improved by training teachers in such concepts as Service English, English for Special purposes, and English as a Library Language. Arabic should then replace English as the language of instruction in the universities, but students who choose to do so should be able to study English for a specific purpose. These changes would increase motivation for the study of English and would eliminate the problem of many students who have found their advanced work to be dependent on their English proficiency. (PM)

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MOTIVATION FOR ENGLISH IN AN EXAMINATION - GEARED SCHOOL SYSTEM

A paper presented by H B Bending, Inspectorate, English Teaching Division, The British Council, at the Seventh Annual Conference of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language. (January 1974)

It is the educational system in Egypt that I wish to discuss. It is a country with a population already increasing towards 40 million people. Within the national education system no fees are charged from the primary to the university stages. The numbers in schools and higher institutions are thus very great. English is not taught in the six years of primary school but is introduced at the 'preparatory' stage (the seventh to tenth years of education). There follows a three year secondary school course with pupils aged approximately 15 years to 18 years. The 'Living English' series - a course based on audio-lingual principles - is used in the first four years of learning English and in the fifth year in the case of pupils in the 'literary sections' of schools. Pupils in the 'scientific sections' use passages from G C Thornley's Easier Scientific English Practice and Scientific English Practice (Longman). Stannard Allen's Living English Structure for Schools (Longman) is used as a background grammar book at the secondary stage. With fee free education and a rapidly increasing population there is a very great demand for the teaching of English. There is a continuing shortage of teachers trained and qualified to teach the language. Consequently teachers with qualifications in social science, geography, librarianship and the like tend to be drafted into the classroom to teach English from the textbooks. There is an urgent problem of in-service training with which the Egyptian Ministry of Education is coping through providing short courses at the Ministry's In-Service Training Centres in Cairo and Alexandria. In the face of the increase in the numbers of pupils and the dilution of staff it has to be admitted that standards of language teaching continue to fall.

Selection for entry to university is based on an aggregate mark obtained from the testing of about 13 subjects in the secondary school leaving examination. Thus pupils achieving a mark of, say, 83% would be eligible for admission to the medical faculties of the universities. Those with a slightly lower mark would be eligible for the engineering faculties - and so on down the scale of marks for other areas of study. In each year decisions are taken by the Egyptian manpower planning authority on which branches of professional training should be treated as priorities in that year. Recently studies in medicine and engineering have been chosen as most immediately important to the

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development of the nation. Subjects such as commerce and agriculture tend to have a relatively lower priority. Marks of about 60% would qualify a pupil to study these subjects and - a matter of regret to us as teachers - a still lower mark tends to gain entry to the faculties of education in which teachers for the preparatory and secondary stages of education are trained.

A modification is made in the case of the American University in Cairo which is a fee-paying institution. Here students may be admitted with rather lower marks. This university serves a useful purpose in providing an avenue for worthy students who do not shine in a competitive school examination. To make provision for foreign students the national universities also admit applicants who have suitable foreign qualifications such as London GCE 'O' and 'A' level passes. Such results can be converted according to grades into a numerical percentage equivalent to the secondary school aggregate mentioned above. The British Council performs a useful service in Cairo by acting as an examination centre for London and Cambridge examinations.

I think it will be clear from the above outline that the over-riding motivation to study English in Egyptian schools is connected with the final examination. This is a general motivation which applies to other subjects as well. However the strength of the motivation is not equal in the cases of all subjects. Mathematics and the sciences are considered to be important subjects in terms of national development and consequently the final examination marks are weighted in their favour. Who can wonder that pupils put more effort into the mastering of these subjects rather than English, French and German?

There will be seen to be an irony in this situation, however, when it is realised that English remains the medium of instruction within the university faculties of medicine, dentistry, veterinary studies, engineering and certain other scientific subjects. A large number of the older generation of Egyptian doctors and dentists received their training in the United Kingdom. A strong tradition of British medicine continues in Egypt and there are frequent interchanges of personnel between the two countries. It will be found that the over-forties in these professions tend to have a very good colloquial and technical command of English. This is far from true, however, in the case of the new generation of undergraduates. There are in fact great ranges of ability which reflect the social changes taking place in the country. Some students from the urban centres or from professional families manage well enough with foreign languages but those from the rural areas tend to be at a distinct disadvantage. The end result

of this linguistic situation is that professors at the universities tend to use a mixed medium combining English technical terminology linked together by colloquial Arabic. There is a continuing debate on which should be the medium of instruction in scientific subjects in the long term in Middle Eastern universities. Towards the end of this paper I shall suggest that Arabic should eventually fulfil this need.

There is no doubt that the older generation of Egyptian professors is well aware of the need for competent service English. The position is not the same in the schools however. Many teachers are still in the grip of an old-fashioned tradition which aims to teach all the language skills. The pupils in secondary schools, in view of their youth and immaturity, are unlikely to appreciate the needs they will have later for the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education. It would be unrealistic to believe that they regard this as a form of motivation at the present time. The pupils main interest is understandably endeavouring to score higher marks in mathematics and science subjects with a view to improving their examination aggregate at the end of their secondary course. There are still in Egypt a small number of English medium schools in which it is possible to take an advanced paper in English. This however yields only marginally more marks in the aggregate and does not serve even as an examination-type motivation in the case of many pupils.

Another aspect of the Egyptian educational scene, as far as motivation is concerned, may be observed at the tertiary stage. There does appear to be a conflict between staff and student motivation within university English departments and any better kind of intrinsic motivation one might wish to promote in the schools. Among the staff in the universities there is a strong motivation towards the study of English literature in its own right and with a view to the production of literary scholars. This tradition has its origins in the British-staffed universities present in Cairo and Alexandria before the 1950's. They were fairly close replicas of British universities and quite understandably imported Eng Lit studies. The literary attitude to work and research tends to influence present day undergraduates. Proficiency in the English language is often seen almost exclusively as a means to this literary goal. Even in the faculties of education the literary tradition continues to be strong in the departments of languages. Many higher studies relate to authors and poets of very little relevance to secondary school education. There seems as yet very little intrinsic motivation towards the study of language and linguistics as worthwhile academic pursuits.

Can these motivations be modified or is it perhaps possible to substitute entirely new motivations? In pondering this question one is forced into a consideration of wider remedies beyond a consideration of motivation alone. For example, it would be wise to question where in the school system in Egypt English should be taught (if it is agreed that it should be taught at all). Governments have to be realistic in the face of massive expansion in educational facilities. It is clear that by reducing the numbers of pupils studying languages, the essential resources of properly trained teachers can be concentrated and better results achieved. Teacher resources could be concentrated on the pupils for whom improved motivation could be provided. One would hope that professional language teachers would be able to stimulate an intrinsic interest in the subject as well as placing clearly in view a recognisable external motivation. To achieve such a happy situation English and French should probably not be compulsory subjects. Pupils in secondary schools might be free to study those languages which could be linked to a possible choice of university career; for example, French could be studied by pupils who were thinking of joining the faculties of law; English could be studied by those who planned to join the faculties of medicine, engineering or one of the sciences. This would lead to the educational objection that pupils would be led towards a career choice at too early an age. I submit however that this would be an improvement on the present position in which the heavy curriculum in Secondary Form Three puts a very great strain upon the pupils.

A great deal more could be done towards an improved awareness of external motivation. A first step would be to ensure that all teachers in training understood clearly why a particular foreign language was being taught. This would involve a proper presentation of the notions of 'Service English', 'English for Special Purposes' and 'English as a Library Language'. These presentations should form a central part of the pre-service training of teachers. (It seems to me a matter of regret that Egypt has merged her Higher Teachers' Colleges with the faculties of education within the universities. This has perhaps prevented flexibility in the development of teacher education and stamped it with a generalised and academic imprint). The literary ambitions of the departments of English in the faculties of arts tend to spill over into the education departments which should in all conscience be concerned with pedagogics. It would appear that the motivation of the staff is often not towards wrestling with problems of the Egyptian class room but towards the acquisition of a higher degree - more often than not in an obscure literary field.

Another problem which has to be mentioned at this point is the general shortage

of university staff. There is a small cadre of lecturers who hold PhD's in English linguistics but they often have to share their time between departments of English and faculties of education sometimes working in more than one university. Clearly this does not assist the development of a full-time and specialised commitment to teacher education.

It is in the faculties of education that it seems to me that the concept of the teaching of English as a library language must be grasped. Improved methodology in the training of reading skills, embracing both adequate comprehension and speed, appears vital. Regrettably such developments are held back by a dearth of suitable reading material in Egypt together with inadequate library facilities and accommodation including seating space for study.

Some organisational initiative is required to change the motivation of language studies towards the concepts of service English and Library languages. One possibility is the provision of intensive pre-university or first semester courses in English for special purposes within the universities. A 'study skills' programme similar to that at Lancaster might be prepared especially for students of medicine, engineering and the sciences. A separate project should be developed to prepare students for admission to the faculties of education. It is gratifying to know that the Universities of Cairo and Alexandria and the American University in Cairo are already planning in this direction.

Turning back for a moment to the situation in the secondary schools, I would like to plead for a less heavy curriculum in Secondary Forms Two and Three. Pupils might be given a chance to choose certain options beyond the basic division into Scientific and Literary Sections. By reducing the number of subjects to be studied and by allowing a choice, it is possible that a more powerful motivation towards the successful study of languages could be achieved.

My final remark is a controversial one. I firmly believe that foreign languages will be better taught in the Middle East as soon as a firm decision is taken on the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction at the tertiary stage. I would suggest that the university authorities should select a date a few years hence when a suitable variety of Arabic will become the medium of instruction in all departments of the university. This would bring to an end the 'in between' stage when the medium of instruction can be one or other

language or a mixture of both. Once this policy has been implemented groups who need English for Special Purposes could be identified and provision made for their particular needs. Students would have a genuine purpose in studying English and the staff available would be concentrated on that purpose. This seems to me a motivation which will make sense.

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